

THE
**SNAIL'S
CASTLE**



MARK GORDON

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Jake Milson wants one thing and one thing only--to win the coveted and prestigious Hollingshead Scholarship to do postgraduate work at Oxford. He intends to travel to England with his girlfriend, Rebecca. But a problem arises. Professor Gregory Percival keeps getting in his way. During Jake's struggle with Percival, the lives of Jake, Rebecca, Percival and Percival's wife, Margaret, intertwine. The novel, with its unexpected twists, draws you into the inner lives of its many captivating characters. It is a story of ambition, love, lust and revenge set against the backdrop of romantic Montreal in the early 1960's.

The Snail's Castle Details

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From Reader Review The Snail's Castle for online ebook

Masi says

The language, oh the language!

I might be damned if I call this erotica but a few of the passages did indeed make me horny (notable one among them is below); yet they are so poetic that you won't ever take any offense to them. I only wish this is the language all real erotica authors used in their books; notice how much tension and excitement between the two lovers is contained in this one paragraph; now that is what I call precision!

"When the clouds finally grew so large and dark and wet they could no longer hold their burden, sometime in late December, after the university had adjourned for Christmas holidays, they let go. Just as they surrendered, Rebecca Sloan, agile as an ermine, dancing on the tip of Jake Milson's man-hood, moaned in the empty frat house, then let every bit of tension she had been saving fall, plummet like the first snowflake of winter. She fell on Jake's chest, clutching his shoulders. "That was so good," she said. "

I only wish my partner said that to me :D

Now if only you are not a casual reader then you would dig deeper and find out that the story is not just about lust but also of overriding ambition and revenge! After the initial 'mess' (you won't know why I used that word if you don't read the book), the plot gets tighter and more gripping with each page you turn - the characters, their surroundings all start to come alive before your very eyes.

The dialogs are truly exceptional and hypnotic; I already gave you one example above, but there are better ones such as this:

""That's very funny. What in the name of rain and earth are you apologizing for?"

"Sorry."

"There you did it again! What a weak-kneed fellow, indeed."

"I can assure you that I was quite powerful at one time. People depended on me."

"And now, pitiful being, you are looking for the snail's castle?"

"It's not my choice. I'd rather be anywhere but here.""

The dialogs in this book, as you can see, really make the characters what they are. The atmosphere only adds further tension to an already dark story:

"One night around midnight, Jake heard noises in the backyard. He put down his book and ran downstairs. Someone was howling. Someone was racing around the backyard, screaming, lurching, smashing Bernie's birdhouses. He smashed them as if they were nothing, as if they were made of twigs and matchsticks. Plastic splintered, pieces of wood went flying."

The way the author paints a vivid picture of a character's mental conflict is no less amazing:

"Papers. Papers. Papers on his desk. Foolscap. Papers on the floor. Notes from lectures. Papers bound in books. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. The Bard stared from the cover, his great round eyes like planets. He accused Jake of being a slug. Jake covered the playwright's eyes with a sheet of lined paper. "

The ensuing heated exchange of dialog is one of the highlights in the entire book (the reason why I love that particular chapter so much); you must not skim that chapter because it is quite a revealing chapter about the major players of the book.

Overall, if you want an out-of-the-ordinary tale of love and revenge, along with a healthy dose of eroticism, you simply cannot go wrong with this book!

Nicolette says

So glad that I read this even though it's out of my usual YA genre
This is apart of a book tour!
go check out the review!
<http://areadaholic.blogspot.com/2015/...>

Mel says

Easy read for me and found myself getting exciting for my evening sessions with it. Recommend it!

Cupcakes and vodka Book Blog says

I was given the opportunity to read Mark Gordon's; The Snail Castle in exchange for my HONEST review.

Wow!

Mark Gordon!!

I don't know if this book is in the erotica category on the shelf in the store. But that's how I am filing it. Parts of it made me very horny. I'm just sayin'. Mark has built a story and characters that intersect in such a way. It is suspenseful, intriguing and riveting. I'll read more of Gordon in the future.

I am very pleased to say. My book group as I call them are the ones that "set me up with mine and Mark's date" Anyway thank you everyone in the group cupcakes and vodka!

Love you girls!

Lisa Macleod says

Mark Gordon has created a wonderful story that draws you into the dream...His descriptive style makes a simple game of cards a work of pure poetry. His characters are strong, complex, and unforgettable. A great read!!!!

Kristian Wilson says

Mark Gordon's *The Snail's Castle* begins with two young lovers, an awkward friend, and an unfair --- and possibly anti-Semitic --- professor. It ends with a road trip into another country. In between, there are ping-pong tournaments, dream analyses, personal revelations, and a lesson in playing euchre. And, naturally, there is *The Snail's Castle*: the mysterious meta-novel protagonist Jake Milson is on a mission to understand.

However, *The Snail's Castle* is too disjointed for any part of its narrative to have an impact. Threads are picked up halfway into the novel and dropped in silence. Conversations feel forced and overly-scripted, and characters' reactions to events feel like performances from April Wheeler's community theater. Jung's shadow concept features prominently for a few chapters, but is later forgotten. Likewise, a relatively minor character becomes a focal point for the book's back third, introducing a handful of new names and personalities that, while entertaining, are never seen again when the narrative shifts back to Jake.

The novel's most interesting thread is, unfortunately, its shortest. When one of Jake's fraternity brothers comes out, *The Snail's Castle* pits the protagonist's apathy against 1960s expectations of conformity. The young man's lover makes only two appearances, but their eventual public confirmation of their sexuality is a "Fuck you" to society that will make you want to cheer. Things don't turn out well, but the character's story arc is too short to allow any emotional response in the wake of tragedy, despite Gordon's intentions to the contrary.

The Snail's Castle makes a few interesting choices with its characterization of Rebecca Sloan, Jake's girlfriend. At first, she's your stereotypical Manic Pixie Dream Girl. She's free-spirited and open with her body. She's Cool Girl. But when, somewhere along the line, Rebecca decides she's done with being Jake's muse, and withdraws herself from his vision of their future, Jake can't bring himself to tolerate her decision. She is nothing more than a box to check off on his list of life goals. Though Rebecca's autonomy may seem to turn the whole idea of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl on its ear, Jake's refusal to acknowledge her identity as separate from his own only reinforces the stereotype. She leaves him alone, as all such tropes must, but --- unlike the protagonists readers are used to seeing paired with such women --- he never grows from the experience.

Jake is too self-absorbed for readers to make any meaningful connection with him. He's an older Holden Caulfield, a younger Benjamin Mandelbaum: all whine and delusions of deserved absolution. When his compulsive ass-kissing causes the main ingredients of his planned future --- Rebecca and an Oxford scholarship --- to fall away from him, Jake is unable to make any headway in forming a new plan. Instead, he resorts to petty intrigue and blackmail in a futile attempt to regain control of his life. But Jake isn't humbled by his losses, and he hasn't actually learned anything about himself or anyone else by the end of the novel.

Ultimately, Jake is why *The Snail's Castle* fails. The book's fragmented narrative and attempted *avant-garde* might be tolerable if its protagonist wasn't insufferably dense and dully self-important. Without any strongly compelling elements, however, Gordon's novel cannot climb out of mediocrity.

I received this book from Legit Lit Book Tours in exchange for this review.

Cori Dyson says

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Generally a review starts out with plot or characters, but I'm not going to discuss those things here. This novel utilizes plot and characters as tools, like a keyboard or a word processor to convey deeper meanings. I believe the deeper meanings are what this author wanted to convey to the reader, not the names of the characters or the plot. There are terrific characters that I'm sure other reviewers will discuss at length, and an entire review could be written about each main character. It is certainly not for the lack of material or quality of material that I am purposefully avoiding these topics, it is because the author skillfully used these as tools for a larger purpose and I want to honor that larger purpose.

The Author

Mark Gordon is the author of *The Snail's Castle*. He is an independent author and this is his third novel.

Literary Fiction or Genre Fiction

This is literary fiction to me. Others may disagree, but I will stand firm on the arguable position that this is, indeed, literary fiction. This novel needs to be read more than once to fully soak into all its meaning and subtleties. I must admit that I have only read it once, though I intend to read it again to gain more insight into its more subtle meanings.

Let the Subtleties Begin

I found a couple of themes in the novel. The first of which is choices. *The Snail's Castle* brilliantly looks at choices from a fresh angle. We all have choices in life and the author reveals in the novel what happens when we fail to choose or to make a choice. People are often cautioned about making the "wrong" choice, but the author is making an argument that not making a choice at all can be far worse.

He makes this argument through one of the supporting characters. The author does this without sharing one inner thought of this character. Yes, all through showing. The author skillfully leads the reader along the journey showing through action, interaction, and observation the supporting character's struggle with making a single choice. We see the results of indecision as clearly as the sun on a cloudless day, all without the author writing from this character's point of view at all. Impressive and brilliantly executed.

The next theme I noted was dreams as in goals. The author certainly covers his share of dreams in the novel which may add to the confusion a bit here, but I believe the theme is a person's aspirations or goals in life and if these dreams or aspirations are really what we need. How many of the aspirations and dreams that we had when we were younger actually came to fruition? How many of the dreams that did not come true are you now glad did not come true?

The author again shows us that not everything that we want out of life is something that we need or that is best for us. He shows us through the main character that holding on too tightly to a dream or aspiration just

because that is all you've ever wanted is foolish and can be dangerous. The author also shows the reader that holding on to anything to the point of strangulation is also equally dangerous and often doesn't work out, but perhaps for the best.

And here Mark Gordon leaves us with an impossible question, to which he alludes to in his book, which is better (or worse)--not making a choice through constant indecision or holding on to a choice that had previously been made for far too long. That is the dilemma or the impossible question the reader is left with. I cannot answer this question and Mark Gordon leaves this answer up to the reader to answer for him or herself.

Book Within a Book

I cannot write a book review without mentioning the book within the book. The most surreal part of reading this book was that it was about a book called The Snail's Castle. The book in the book was a wonderful stream of consciousness or subconscious dream outlining one of the character's inner conflicts. A brilliant idea flawless in execution. To discuss this book anymore in this review would most certainly be spoilers! So I will take head from River Song and shout "Spoilers" before running away.

As You Read The Snail's Castle

Along your journey into the lives of these characters, and in some cases into their subconscious, the writing is a beautiful prose reminiscent of poetry. He has a unique voice that is both easy to read and follow and his descriptions of characters and the world they live in is vivid and encompassing. His descriptions are so vivid that I feel as if I am present in the story smelling history, tasting the air, feeling the cold deep in my bones, and seeing the character's faces in exquisite detail.

I Highly Recommend this Novel for Anyone who...

Loves reading

Loves discovering the underlying themes in novels such as Withering Heights or To Kill a Mockingbird.

Loves reading well written novels with beautiful prose and descriptions which are poetic

Wants to read how an author implemented Jungian philosophy well into a novel

Enjoys literary fiction.

I See this Book Becoming a Classic One Day,

So read it now while you can so you can say that you read it when it first came out. You can say that you own a first edition. He has a contest on his website to give away a free signed paperback copy of his novel. I would recommend you signing up for it, I know I am.

Lisa Brunette says

One of the best indie books I've read all year. Mark Gordon's writing is lyrical and lovely, and his characters are well-developed. I loved the plot twist with the inclusion of the fictitious book, The Snail's Castle. But what really struck me is that this book is ABOUT SOMETHING. It's not often that we come across such an earnest story line these days. I definitely recommend it.

Jennifer Kirkwood (Levac) says

I received a copy of this book from the author in exchange for an honest review. The original review can be viewed at Genuine Jenn

Literary fiction at its best. Sometimes you find yourself reading a book and really feel that there isn't really anything to it. You can fly through it without any deep dialogue or thoughts from the characters, not really connecting with them at all. Mark Gordon's The Snail's Castle is not one of those books.

This novel was really well put together. The characters are well developed and I loved how they were all intricately entwined with each other. I found this to be a very deep book. I had to really immerse myself in the story to keep up to what was happening between the characters and where it was heading. I haven't read this genre lately but found myself deep in this book and wanting to follow the story without interruption. The characters are very easy to relate to. Jake is the main character and he is on a mission to attend Oxford and have his girlfriend Rebecca come along with him. Jake will do anything to achieve his goals for his future, even blackmail, sending his girlfriend into the professor's office to see what he was looking for in the paper, which Jake received a C minus for. Jake knew of a rumor of Percival (Professor) having sex with his students and he still sent Rebecca in there. At first I was thinking oh no not another affair type of story, but really once the story line developed more and more it really took a different approach to the topic altogether.

It follows Jake and a fraternity of Jewish boys in the early 1960's while they overcome obstacles of love, school and sexuality. This book will have you hooked. I love that it was set in Montreal, Quebec, Canada and that the story deals with trials of the time and trials that are still faced to this day. The Snail's Castle is a book that Percival gives out to both Rebecca and Jake. Each takes a different path with the novel. The author gives us snippets of the book within his book that are disturbing enough to give Jake nightmares.

I give The Snail's Castle by Mark Gordon a 5 out of 5. This is a book about life and has tons of substance. Deep and light there are paths we will take while others will not. I really had a hard time putting my thoughts into words for this review as the book had my mind all over the place with the story, but in a good way. I really enjoyed this book and look forward to reading more from Mark Gordon.

Kimberley says

Mark Gordon does gorgeous things with the language. The Snail's Castle takes you into a cold Montreal winter to follow a young, driven man on a quest to follow his dream. You do not read the words so much as allow them to wrap around you and make you shiver as the icy winter winds blow, seek refuge with the protagonist in his frat house, or enjoy the warmth of freshly baked treats served by his girlfriend's mother.

The Snail's Castle takes the reader to an almost an enchanted place.

An immensely good read!

Linty says

The snail's castle is a brilliantly written multi-layered story, reminiscent of the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, in that it's a character based story that delves deeply into the human psyche.

This is a story with very flawed, sometimes dark, human characters. Characters whose lives intersect throughout the book, leading to interesting situations. I lost sleep wanting to see what happens (just one more page!). That's a sign of a great book for me.

The novel really captured the feel of the time period (1960's). Set in Montreal, you find yourself there, living alongside the characters.

Gordon is a talented, poetic writer who is very good at creating sharp imagery and strong characters..and love or hate them, either way, you will be drawn in to their lives. You may even see some things of your own mind in them.

If you're looking for a character driven story that will stay with you long after reading it, do yourself a favor and check this book out.

Jack Messenger says

A wonderfully intelligent novel from a gifted writer

Carl Jung's concept of the Shadow is one of many intertwined and mutually reinforcing themes in Mark Gordon's complex and absorbing novel. The Shadow comprises the negative, primitive and morally reprehensible emotions and impulses inaccessible to the conscious mind: among them, lust, greed, envy, rage and the pursuit of power. It is at its most dangerous when habitually repressed and rejected, eventually manifesting itself in mental disturbances such as neurosis, psychosis or irrational hostility.

The majority of the characters in The Snail's Castle are haunted by the Shadow in one way or another, particularly Jake Milson, a US student of English Literature at McGill University in Montreal in the early 1960s. Jake has set his mind on winning a scholarship to study at Oxford, but his enviable academic record of straight A's is suddenly tarnished by a C-minus for an essay in Creative Criticism, taught by poet Gregory Percival. Jake's scholarly success is in part due to his careful homework on the predilections and obsessions of his teachers, enabling him to slant his own work to reflect their pet theories. Percival, however, is unimpressed. Jake's efforts to change the professor's mind – by hook or by crook – become increasingly personal and obsessive, and neither of them is prepared to give an inch in a battle of psyches that rapidly

overwhelms Percival's wife Margaret (whom he has betrayed sexually time and again), Jake's girlfriend Rebecca (who falls for Percival's charm) and even the unwitting members of Jake's student fraternity.

Jake and Percival prowl the same moral morass, but their paths rarely cross, as Percival – appropriately – is a shadowy figure, difficult to meet and impossible to intimidate. The novel expands with the proliferating connotations and ramifications of their relationship, which becomes a kind of twinship that holds up a mirror for Jake to see himself as he really is – if only he had the self-insight to look. At one point, late on in the novel, he feels a burning sensation in his chest, which accompanies the thought that 'it felt good to say something without any ulterior motive, to say something sincerely.' Here, Jake confirms our suspicion that he has hitherto been an unreliable guide to his own motives, and is at last beginning to wise-up.

Jake and Percival are competing males, with women as their accomplices and their victims. They are also two poles of an unstable binary opposition between critical analysis and artistic creativity, which are reconciled at novel's end. If that sounds dry and academic, it isn't, and there is a great deal more at stake than male pride.

Jake and his fraternity brothers are Jewish, as are many of their girlfriends, including Rebecca. Issues of group- and self-identification infuse the narrative with the bitter aftertaste of Holocaust and pogrom, along with a prickly sensitivity to the latent and not-so-latent anti-Semitism of Montreal's elites. Class and privilege, wealth and power, intersect with personal aspirations and romantic relationships, and the very geography of the city is a grid of social distinctions that can be traversed but never ignored. There are some places where access confers little more than ridicule and shame. They also provoke in Jake a vision: 'he saw naked bodies marching to Auschwitz. He saw goose-stepping troops. He remembered that the gypsies, the queers, and the socialists were herded, along with the Jews, to the showers that washed away all sins.' Great evils are born of everyday incivilities.

This awful weight of personal and cultural history is emphasized by recurring allusions to classical myth, biblical imagery and, of course, works of literature. Shakespeare's King Lear – especially Lear's rantings on the storm-ridden heath – is particularly apropos, but the major chord is struck by a rare and peculiar book loaned by Percival to Rebecca and Jake, called – The Snail's Castle. Jake attempts to unlock the mysteries of its bizarre narrative, only to find himself sinking into the moral quagmire of its main character. This brilliant self-reflexive trope highlights the power and the danger of the Word (of words written on the page and in the heart) and the problematic interconnections of literature and life. Books, however well written, are not life, but a parallel form of human experience, and the two should not be confused.

Mud – its depth and consistency, its suitability as a burial site for unwanted memories – is a ubiquitous symbol, both in the book-within-the-book and in the lives of Jake and Margaret, who remembers plunging her hands in the earth of her beloved grandmother's garden. Margaret experiences a mental storm of memories that competes with the snowstorms that form Montreal's winter landscape (Nature's version of a whitened sepulchre), evoked effortlessly by the author's poetically precise prose. It is Margaret, too, who unknowingly echoes a theme of the book-within-the-book: 'We've all got these little empty spaces, Jake. And we run around trying to fill them up. Sometimes with nostalgia.'

To which character(s) does The Snail's Castle belong? The opening sections provoke uncertainty in this regard, rather as the camera in a film by Michelangelo Antonioni permits its dispassionate gaze to rest first on this character, then on that, before making up its mind to follow someone else entirely. Jake's is the disputed but dominant voice, but even he is shouldered aside for a couple of chapters by Margaret's claims on ownership. Personally, I found this a jolt, and at a point where I think the novel begins to lose its way, or at least its focus, for some little while. I also began to question the amplitude of memories available at a

moment's notice for several characters at various stages, especially Margaret. The sheer quantity and detail of her memories deflect attention from their immediate cause, so that her present experience is covered over by a welter of images and ideas in which she and the reader lose their way. But perhaps that is the point and I am wrong.

In any case, these are minor quibbles. For all its seriousness, *The Snail's Castle* has a light, assured tone that makes for compulsive reading. At turns amusing and disturbing, it is among the most literary of literary works, with a deep intelligence that expects its readers also to be intelligent. That is a rare compliment that should be savoured. I thoroughly recommend this stimulating novel, so beautifully written by a gifted writer, to whom I offer my hearty congratulations.

Carla says

The Snail's Castle is an interesting, suspenseful book that I had to give my full attention to. Mark Gordon creates an interesting world of characters whose lives intersect with what started as a goal to achieve a scholarship but led to lust and revenge.

Jake is consumed by the thought of achieving the Hollingshead scholarship. So much so that he puts it above friendship, love, creativity and integrity. His goal is put above all else and it can be even frustrating to watch him put this selfish need in front of emotional needs, friendship and family. It is almost as though he lives in his own world of greed and this is the only thing that matters in the end.

The novel took an interesting twist when Jake is given a book from Percival, a book that he just can't wrap his mind around. I found when this book is introduced I had to pay closer attention as we are given excerpts of this book and I did not want to miss anything. *The Snail's Castle* is an intriguing tale of what ambition, lust and revenge can do to a person.
